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ABSTRACT

Projections for a possible scenario for a television broadcast newsroom in 2001 would include a nearly completely computerized system, one which will write scripts, select and create graphics, organize newscasts and visuals, keep records, do research, and manage the newsroom from terminals. This computer system will generate many more newscasts and provide news to a greater variety of outlets than are available today. Television newsrooms in 2001 will be high-tech centers, filled with games and gadgets, where technology will replace almost all human effort except communication (as in editing and creating the newscast). Other innovations in the communications industry will be high definition TV, some form of home TV alphanumerics teletext, videotex, or both, cable as a nearly equal partner in the national media mix, investment of network money in cable broadcasting, direct broadcasting by satellite, and a more global outlook for local TV news. Data and video will be moving around the world via the telephone company's fiber optics. Better research into what individuals are watching will help broadcasters program to large but still "minority" segments of the audience. (NKA)

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R-T-N-D-A Talk - TV Technology Session
Friday, August 29, 1986
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THE NEWSROOM TO THE YEAR 2001

This morning we will be talking about changes which COULD take place in the next 15 years.

In thinking about changes which might happen, I started to reflect on just how much broadcast journalism has changed in my professional lifetime, which spans 25 years..

Ten years ago I left CBS News to become a professor. When I was working at the former dairy barn on West 57th Street in New York City....

- I knew who owned CBS.
- The company doctor was trying to ferret out homosexuals - not drug addicts.
- The Morning News was having rating problems,

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and the CBS management kept changing the show's format and firing Executive Producers.

- CBS kept changing chief executive officers.
- Every so often there were layoffs to bring the profit and loss sheet back to stockholder's idea of heaven.
- Wire service machines clattered.
- IATSE was still shooting SOME film.
- Fiber optics was something we read about in Bell Labs ads.
- And Van Gordon Sauter, Rob Sunde and Lane Vernados walked around with smiles on their faces.

Some things change...some don't...but if you think the incessant pressure of change brought by technology is going to let up in the next 15 years...you're mistaken.

We could debate for hours whether technology drives our business or the business drives technology. We do know that

some technologies are born of need, for example, electronic news gathering. Others arrive and carry us along such as satellite news collection (notice how cleverly we avoided using Mr. Hubbard's copyright phrase). And still other technologies lie around looking for a market...such as teletext.

Currently we are experiencing radical changes in the relationship...even balance...between affiliate news departments and the network news organizations in New York. Satellite news vehicles...technological devices...have triggered the human dynamics which brought about these changes.

Over the horizon...we can expect broadcast and cable televisers to spend billions of dollars (and yen) to bring us High Definition Television. Will H-D-T-V affect us...it could...in terms of equipment...quality standards...and artistic concepts.

Look where we are now. Television, the medium we are talking about today...brought about a massive shakeup of the radio industry. Today, technology is making TV news more LIKE radio news in terms of the immediacy of "almost instant news" even to the extent of tearing down programming barriers in order to insert breaking news stories.

Within the newsroom, computers provide better prompting and, for the first time, offer us a useful and usable archives system.

Still stores eliminate the need to use greasy, lint-covered slides....character generators do all we need done with titles....except spell the names correctly.

And satellite news vehicles extend the "circle of coverage" of the local TV station to include the globe.

We've come a long way....using technology to give our medium, immediacy, improved picture quality, vastly improved production values and recognition as a DISTINCT and IMPORTANT source of news and information.

Let´s put our "future think" caps on.....and visualize the environment of our audience 15 years from now.

They will have greater dependence on and use for computers and the tools of telecommunication. Today´s 14-year-olds trying out the new computer games at the mall are tomorrow´s "yuppies". They will accept computers and telecommunication devices as a natural part of their environment. They will be spared the mental anguish many of us here today have undergone, coming to terms with keyboard and screen. Teletext, videotex, interactive communication, 104-channel cable, direct broadcast by satellite, high definition television...will be "ho hum" items.

Many of our 2001 people will be using some form of home TV alphanumerics - teletext, videotex or both. If the Home Shopping Network can turn Clearwater into a high-tech industrial park....using "800" TELEPHONE service...then our 2001 yuppies will be ordering via interactive keypads and

computer terminals. The message the video shopping services are sending is that some specialized applications of telecommunication technology - narrowcasting - WILL catch on.

Maybe...just maybe...electronic banking will have a firm foothold...if we can ever get over our mistrust of computers which store the negative balances in our bank accounts.

As we say in the Good Old South...the fat lady hasn´t sung...and the opera isn´t over for cable. I´m willing to bet cable will become a nearly equal partner in the national media mix...with our 2001 people perceiving cable networks as being the same as broadcast networks. Personally, I´m not too worried about the Big 3 in the Big Apple...after they´ve merged, surged and verged on the brink of disaster...they´ll take some of that money stored in the sub-basement and invest in whatever new technology looks strongest -- which will probably be cable.

We might even call the cable operations - network clones.

Direct broadcasting by satellite will have its niche...but I think the major applications of D-B-S as a public telecommunication medium...will occur outside the U.S. Right now, D-B-S is revolutionizing television in Europe. The next time you go on vacation to France you may be able to see "Upstairs, Downstairs"; The Cookie Monster and a continental clone of C-N-N...instead of those boring, poorly produced shows the French government transmits.

Backyard dish owners on the East Coast of the U.S. may be able to take a peak at Europe by aiming at a satellite yet to be launched which will carry programming originating in Ireland.

We are ready for another big leap forward in the aviation industry. By 2001 high speed aircraft should make travel more convenient but one thing won´t change. Americans like to take their culture with them (that´s why

my students in London walked down the street in South Kensington to a 7-Eleven and ate steak and pizza in a nearby restaurant with Texas in its name). Americans in 2001 will get the Cable News Network plus many of their favorite TV shows from home while they saute themselves on the beaches of France or sip slings in Singapore.

Local TV news will be much more global in outlook. The networks won't be the only source of national and international stories and you will be taking feeds from a dozen or more video wire services and news-sharing cooperatives.

On the topic of video wire services - we already have Conus, and the Conus-A.P. project in Washington, and for some, feeds from C-N-N, Westinghouse and Lorimar-Telepictures. Visnews in London is positioned to provide much more video from around the world...and there are other big players in the telecom world who can provide news from around the globe. They include Ted Turner, if he can get

over chuggalugging that shot of straight Russian vodka called the Goodwill Games. Murdoch can do it...Robert Maxwell in Britian could do it...but Berlesconi is a question mark.

The needs of commerce plus better educational standards will encourage our 2001 viewers to travel more and acquire a more global perspective. Isolationism will diminish and your viewers will show more interest in what´s going on elsewhere in the world.

We´ll pay less attention to counting TV HOMES and more attention to counting TV SETS. Better research into what individuals are watching will provide us with a much clearer understanding how to program successfully to large but still "minority" segments of the audience.

High definition TV will be in the marketplace, but I doubt it will be fully integrated due to the still unresolved debate over standards and the massive retooling which may be necessary at both the transmission and

reception locations. Now, this could all change if we are successful in developing some kind of high-quality digital transmission which can be sent over cable or bandwidths similar to what we have now and reassembled by a "smart" TV set in the viewer´s home.

And our old nemesis...the telephone company...will be back in the catbird seat...moving data and video around the world via fiber optics.

In fact, G-T-E announced this week it has found a way to double the already impressive capacity of fiber cable.

How is all this going to affect you...providing you haven´t (1) retired, (2) won the New York State lottery, (3) gone into teaching or (4) taken the owner´s child as your third spouse.....

Let´s break down our future scenario into the likely effects of specific technologies...some of which will be addressed in greater detail by members of our panel:

I really don´t know whether we will have a standard for electronic newsgathering gear by 2001. My feeling is that sometime in 1987 the various committees working on standards will go into gridlock and by 2001 we will be using them as a tourist attraction - like going to the museum of natural history to view the reconstructed skeleton of a dinosaur.

Cameras will be so small your videographers will be embarrassed to take them out of their handbags or shirt pockets.

I put the feminine reference first because by 2001 candidates for office in RTNDA will be MOST SOLICITOUS of the large number of female voting members....because women dominate the educational stream.

The tubeless or C-C-D camera should be the industry standard....and your people will be bringing back fabulous video, often shot under the worst possible light conditions.

The industry will be so competitive that those of you who will be working in smaller markets may be assigning a camera to each reporter....and we will be back to having the reporter shoot a good part of the video.

If the miracle camera....our electronic pencil...does indeed come into existence...and if prices fall...we may find ourselves shooting news conferences alongside videographers from cable systems and even low-power TV stations.

The coming of miniature video cassettes and solid media such as video and computer disks will reduce the size of editing gear. The reduction in size of editors will take editing out of the back room at some stations and move it to reporters desks...mobile units...and bureaus.

I can visualize a TV newsroom which resembles some of today's radio newsrooms....with each reporter having a work station which will include a built in tape editor as well as a computer terminal. That terminal might even drive the editor.

We'll see vast differences in electronic newsgathering. Fortunately by then all of those neat little vans will have worn out, because the combination of digital technology, fiber optics, digital technology and miniaturization will diminish our reliance on microwave in favor of transmission over terrestrial lines - which is to say we will plug into the telephone or a cable. Microwave will be an option...but only an option...and even then, I think we will be using gear which we can store in the trunk of a sedan.

If we do operate vans, I expect they will be miniature newsrooms where the reporter and videographer shoot, write and edit finished packages for transmission to the station. This, obviously, will create a need for procedures to assure

the editorial quality of products produced away from the newsroom. If we can still afford them...I think our editors or producers will be looking at a lot of incoming product and recommending changes in the field. It makes me think of the audio recording room at CBS News where we used to make field reporters rewrite their pieces.

Satellite news coverage will have been relegated to its rightful place - as one of the many tools we use in gathering news. I think we will see relatively few of the huge satellite news vehicles swaying down the highway. We will see compact combo units which combine microwave and satellite uplinking in very efficient packages...this is no great shakes as a prediction because we're nearly there as far as developing combo vans.

Many of the satellites we use today will have been retired and while newer and better "birds" will be up there....fiber optic technology....thin, easy to lay and resilient cables which will carry many high-quality

signals...will be so pervasive that we will combine easy access to fiber optic networks with digital technology and do most of our distant feeds from telephones or special fiber optic cable taps.

Satellites will assume a backstop position in the U.S. and between the major high-tech nations. In fact, a project is currently underway, laying fiber optic cable between Great Britain and the U.S. This reliable, high quality transmission medium will take a great deal of business away from satellite vendors.

On the other hand...miniaturization of cameras, editors and earth stations will allow us to go to the more remote reaches of the globe and provide timely live or live on tape coverage direct from the location of our story because we will carry our equipment in the equivalent of suitcases rather than using the clumsy "portable" cases currently offered for fly-away service. This capability will frustrate the P-T-T-s the postal/telecommunication

officialdom - in many developing countries and we will expend more energy getting permission to transmit (or preventing interference with our transmission) than we will expend in the act of transmission itself.

Now we're going to make one group of vendors extremely happy by predicting that newsroom computer systems will replace typewriters in almost all TV newsrooms.

More important to us is the fact that the newsroom computer system will have reached or nearly reached its full utilization. We will write scripts, select and create graphics, organize newscasts and visuals, keep records, do research and manage our newsrooms from terminals...but more significant, the production of the newscast will be guided by the newsroom computer system, which will drive an automated control room. There are two reasons for this: first, the economics of the industry in coming years will demand that people (operators) be replaced by microchips and second, given the capability to automate, you will prefer to

have complete control over your newscast, from the first words which are written and pictures which are shot to the final product which goes out over the --- fill in the blank -- air...cable...satellite...fiber optic network.

I´m willing to bet that newsroom computer system will be used to help you produce MANY MORE newscasts than you do today and finally newsroom computer company programmers will become "user friendly" and cuddly, allowing us to use something besides fortran to get out the news. Some stations will do more news. Many will diversify and provide news from your newsroom to a variety of outlets, including cable systems, L-P-T-V stations, the station´s teletext generator and specialized radio networks.

Now, maybe we´ve finally come to something which can´t be improved. How about graphics? Can there be significant improvements in today´s highly sophisticated computer graphics systems? My bet is the answer we get from our panelists today is yes. How about giving our reporters and

producers graphics capabilities....no, I don't mean letting them draw stick characters....but they might be able to create charts or call on a library of "paste up" art to create some of their own graphics.

Now, about those helicopters. One of my daydreams is that by 2001 someone will buy a used C-I-A spy satellite and offer a service whereby we can order video of the "top" of a news scene cheaper than we can fly a helicopter over the scene. Of course, the very existence of a civilian, rent-by-the-minute spy-in-the-sky satellite opens a whole world of ethical questions involving intrusion into private property. For instance, how is a satellite service going to keep its techs from seeking out nude sunbathers?

Maybe we will be able to buy a solid-state, miniaturized, programmable....safe....portable...helicopter which anyone on the staff can fly. Or...maybe we could get some of those experimental jet backpacks from the army.

Enough of this flight into fantasy. I'm convinced that in 2001 TV newsrooms will be high-tech centers, filled with games and gadgets, where technology will replace almost all human effort except communication - the act of perceiving...digging out...developing...writing and visualizing and airing a news story...as well as the editing and creation of the newscast, which seem better left in the hands and minds of people.

Market forces...many being byproducts of technology...will demand that we employ technological devices at every step in the newsgathering and dissemination process...so that we can do what we do WELL today.... BETTER....in a more competitive, less affluent marketplace.

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